

Jeffords plays tough on 'green'

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WASHINGTON -- Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., appears to be giving a red light to a colleague's legislative effort until Jeffords' own proposal making federal buildings "green" is a go.

Jeffords recently placed a hold on a measure poised for a Senate vote, GOVEXEC.com, an Internet news site that caters to government employees, reported on Friday.

Holds are sometimes used by senators to stall legislation in an attempt to muscle up support for their own bills. They are often controversial.

In this case, Jeffords is trying to push through legislation before he retires in December that would force the federal government to construct environmentally friendly buildings.

A major developer with thousands of office buildings across the country, the government would follow guidelines under the proposal that reduce construction pollution, preserve electricity and provide a healthier workplace for employees.

One "green" technique, for example, would have buildings capture rainwater for use in their plumbing. Other guidelines call for more windows, better views and the use of recycled construction materials.

Others would generate their own electricity, meaning they could "assist in keeping our government up and running" in the event of a terrorist attack, Jeffords said two weeks ago when he introduced the measure.

"Not only will this bill improve federal building efficiency and employee health and productivity, it also demonstrates the leadership of the federal government on High-Performance Green Buildings," Jeffords said then.

Holds are done anonymously and often spur frustration from the senators suffering the setback. Jeffords office refused to confirm or deny that the senator invoked the hold.

"We don't really comment on holds. We never have," said Ken Connolly, Jeffords' staff director for the Environment and Public Works Committee, on which Jeffords is the ranking minority member.

But Connolly added, "Sen. Jeffords is trying to do everything he can to get his Green building act passed into law this year."

The hold stalled a plan to consolidate two revolving funds in the General Services Administration. The agency is the single largest civilian landlord in the nation, having 8,900 buildings, and Jeffords tasked it with leading the effort to make the federal government green.

"The GSA is a natural leader to focus on our federal buildings and ensure that they are safe, healthy, and efficient," he said two weeks ago.